

First Skyscraper, 638 Royal Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana

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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
Louisiana

Historical American Buildings Survey  
Richard Koch, District Officer  
614 Audubon Building, New Orleans, Louisiana

THE FIRST SKYSCRAPER

638 Royal Street - New Orleans - Orleans Parish

Owner:

Joseph Saba, 1711 North Broad Street

Date of Erection:

Approximately 1800

Architect:

Remodeled 1811 by Latour & Laclette

Builder:

Present Condition:

Fair. Remodeled 1934; fourth story added 1876(?)

Number of Stories:

Four.

Materials of Construction:

Brick, cemented; composition roof.

Other existing records:

Chain of Title, attached hereto  
Contract for remodeling, attached hereto  
Pierre Pedesclaux Application for Loan (Notarial Records)  
Mortgage Foreclosure (Louisiana Courier, 1821)  
New Orleans States, July 19, 1926  
New Orleans, Its Old Houses, Shops and Public Buildings  
N. C. Curtis; Lippincott & Co., 1933  
Old New Orleans, Stanley C. Arthur; Harmanson,  
New Orleans, 1936

Additional Data:

The massive four-story building on the southeast corner of Royal and St. Peter Streets, called the First Skyscraper, and sometimes Sieur George's House from its association with George W. Cable's story of that name, should be more properly called the Lemonnier House, as in its heyday it was the home of Dr. Yves Lemonnier.

The history of the house is somewhat confused as its battered condition and evidences of alterations would suggest. Commenced during the period of prosperity, following the purchase of Louisiana by the United States, Pierre Pedesclaux, Notary, in 1806 made a loan of \$17,000.00 to pay debts contracted in the erection of the building and for funds for its completion. It is not clear whether or not Pierre Pedesclaux finished the house, for on May 2nd, 1811, Dr. Yves LeMonnier and Francois Grandchamps bought the house from the creditors, and on May 7th, 1811, signed a contract with Arsene LaCarriere Latour and Hyacinth Laclotte for certain alterations and additions.

Arsene LaCarriere Latour was a French emigre' who had been made a major by brevet by General Andrew Jackson before the Battle of New Orleans, and our knowledge of that battle is through his "Historical Memoirs of West Florida and Louisiana - 1814-1815".

Hyacinth Laclotte was an architect, probably a graduate of Beaux Arts, and a sketch of the Battle of New Orleans in Latour's book, showing the old plantation house, was made by him. There were also notices in the local papers of their architectural atelier.

In 1831, Dr. LeMonnier acquired the half interest of Francois Grandchamps in this house. There is no definite record of his adding the fourth story to this building, and this may have been added by Bertrand Saloy in 1876. It is this addition which gives this house the name of THE FIRST SKYSCRAPER. It is said that this was

the first four-story building built in New Orleans, and much comment was made as to whether or not the soil would stand such weight. Recent investigation leads us to believe that this story of the First Skyscraper is the imagination of Lafcadio Hearn.

The building, though more massive, is a typical New Orleans house of the early 1800's, with the ground floor occupied by shops and the living quarters above, all centering about a paved courtyard with a stairway leading from this courtyard to the upper floors. The facades are well studied with a low arched base, the windows above tied together with heavy cement bands, and accented on the third story by the excellently wrought iron balconies with the monogram of Dr. Lemonnier in their design. Unfortunately there is no data as to the date of this ironwork.

The arches of the first floor were most likely glazed, with circular transoms. The detail of the windows is excellent and in contrast to the crude mouldings of the plaster cornices and bands. No doubt a parapet once existed with a pitched roof behind.

The closed string stairway between the wall of the courtyard with its fan windows and the arches on the wall separating it from the hall leading to the rooms of the entresol, has quite a medieval feeling. The treads are of large blocks of cypress as also are the newell posts. The handrail is apparently of black walnut, but most likely of San Domingo mahogany. The principal rooms are located on the third floor ("le premier etage").

Here is located a large oval room of excellent proportions with a domed plaster ceiling, from which casement windows open onto the curved corner balcony. The room has a wood cornice and a false door for reasons of symmetry. The planning of this room with its alcove shows definitely the training of the French school.

After the Lemonniers sold the property, alterations had been made from time to time that have detracted from what originally was a complete and well studied house. Recently it has again been remodeled in a modern manner with a brick stairway leading from the courtyard to functional kitchenettes. Dr. Lemonnier's salon has been painted blue with stars on the ceiling and the lower floor is now occupied by a barroom and a modern gift shop.

C h a i n   o f   T i t l e

Present Owner:     Joseph Saba. Acquired from Alfred Danziger, June 3, 1904. Sale price \$5,825.00. Acts before F. J. Dreyfous.

Alfred David Danziger acquired from Marco Decina, June 3, 1904 Act before Edward Rightor, N. P.

Marcus Decina obtained property by succession of his wife, Carmelite Carcagno. Recorded in same act as above.

Carmelite Carcagno, wife of Marcus Desina, and sole daughter of Antonio Carcagno, acquired by succession of Carmelite Carcagno Soloy, May 12, 1892. Recorded in C. O. B. 145, Fol. 59

Carmelite Carcagno Soloy inherited from her deceased husband, Bertrand Soloy, January 7, 1890. Recorded in C. O. B. 145, Fol. 159

Bertrand Soloy acquired from Jean Fisse, December 11, 1876, through

Sheriff's sale. Recorded in C. O. B. 107, Fol. 919.

Jean Fisse acquired from Mrs. Paul Marie Petit (Miss Jean LeMonnier) February 13, 1860. Act before Octave de Armas, N. P. (Price \$14,000.00)

Property was in possession of Marie Jeanne LeMonnier Petit on October 11, 1847, when she was residing in Rennes, France, and gave power of attorney to Chas. Jh. Darron, resident of New Orleans. This document was recorded in New Orleans January 07, 1848, before J. Agisse, N. P.

At the succession of the estate of Dr. Yves Lemonnier May 5, 1838, before N. P. Ducatel, N. P., the heirs were given as: Yves Rene Le Monnier, Anne Celeste Le Monnier, Marie Amire Le Monnier, Mrs. Marie Amire Le Monnier, wife of John Macready. Property valued at \$24,000.00.

There was a subsequent division made between the heirs as notarized before Ami Ducatel, May 19, 1838; March 28, 1839; May 5, 1838; and the property apparently finally acquired by Yves Rene Le Monnier.

The records are not quite clear but it appears that Marie Jeanne Le Monnier Petit acquired the property from Yves Rene LeMonnier, who apparently was her father.

Dr. Yves Le Monnier became sole owner when he acquired the half interest of Francois Grandchamps May 1, 1821, by act before Hughes Laverne, N. P.

Dr. Yves Le Monnier and Francois Grandchamps acquired the property on May 2, 1811, from Joseph Tricou, Richard Relf, Jean Baptiste Labatut and four creditors of Pierre Pedesolaux, by act before Narcisse Broutin, N. P., and apparently by mistake this was recorded under date of May 2, 1812.

AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN

Yves LeMonnier and Francois Grandohampe and L. Latour & Laclotte  
Dated May 7, 1811

Before me, Narcisse Broutin, duly commissioned and authorized  
Notary Public for the City and Parish of Orleans, here residing, and  
the witnesses hereinafter named:

WERE PRESENT: Messrs Yves LeMonnier and Francois Grandohamps,  
property owners, residing in this city, of the First Part, and

Arsene la Carriere Latour and Hyacinth Laclotte, both engi-  
neers and contractors, residing in this same city of New Orleans, of  
the other part, who declare having agreed between them that which  
follows, namely:

That Messrs. Latour and Laclotte obligate themselves to  
perform the works specified in the estimate and detailed statement  
hereto attached, in the space of five months from date, and no  
further delay; and in consideration of the sum of \$6,000.00, of which  
\$2,000.00 cash, \$2,000.00 at such time as one half of the roofing  
shall have been made, and the joists for the terraces placed at the  
new living quarters, payable \$1,500.00 in currency and \$500.00 of  
materials, which shall be delivered at that time, and \$2,000.00 re-  
maining to be paid at the termination of the work, payable also  
\$1,500.00 in currency and \$500.00 in materials for the proposal  
made by the said Messrs. Latour and Laclotte to furnish surety on  
a mortgage as guaranteed for the roofing for the term of one year.

In the event that the said house shall not be completed at

the time hereinabove stated, five months, whatever indemnities claimed by Messrs LeMonnier and Grandchamps shall be fixed by arbitrators.

It is understood that all materials whatsoever, such as lumber, tiles, etc., derived from the demolition, remain the property of Messrs. Latour and Laclotte for their use, to do with and dispose of as they see fit, and that they shall in no way be responsible for the consequences of a fire. It is thus that the whole has been accepted and assented to by the parties under the reciprocal obligations to execute the terms and conditions inserted in these presents.

Made and passed at New Orleans, in the office of myself as a Notary, on the seventh day of May, in the year 1811, and the 35th year of the Independence of America, in the presence of Messrs. Pierre Francois Simon Godefray and Cy. Leroux, both witnesses, born and reared in the city, who, together with the parties, have signed with me as Notary after due perusal.

(SIGNED)  
A. Lre. Latour  
Hys. Laclotte

(SIGNED)  
Fr. Grandchamps

Cey. Leroux  
S. Godefray

ESTIMATE OF THE WORK WHICH THE UNDERSIGNED OBLIGATE  
THEMSELVES TO PERFORM IN THE PEDESCLAUX HOUSE

\* \* \* \* \*

To be paved of brick: baked in a mortar bath; the entire yard.  
To arch the wells: ready to receive a pump  
To build a stairway: LEADING TO THE KITCHEN OF THE LIVING QUARTERS;  
To complete in the proper manner of the water closets.



### GROUND FLOOR

Store on the side of Mr. Pitot's house.

Floors entirely of earth; what is left of the portion already made up to the alignments of the walls.

To make and hang a double door in the store on the yard side, and fit it with 9-inch lock.

A pantry door, under the stairway; strong and barred up; fitted with proper lock.

To replace the steps or the parts of the stairway where found rotten.  
To make a ceiling under this stairway at the second flight.

To build one large . . . on the yard side . . . glazing, having Venetian shutters.

To do over and level the flooring of the stores, wherever required, also to remove a partition in one of the stores on St. Peter Street.

### ENTRESOL

To elevate all the walls of the new living quarters and enclosure to the level of the ceiling.

To change all woodwork on that floor which should be changed, such as small joists, etc.

To make new flooring in all the new living quarters.

To pave the kitchen.

To do over the flooring portion at the end of the stairway.

To construct a gallery over the yard parallel to the one over St. Peter Street.

Two warped partitions, one of which will separate the kitchen from the diningroom, and the other separating the kitchen from the pantry.

One (1) solid door with two vents, and one window in the kitchen.

One (1) glazed door in dining room.

One (1) door in pantry, one vent.

The walls properly done over.  
A rail with straight bars enclosing the gallery.  
To build double water closets.  
To ceil the dining room and the kitchen.  
Replacing the old walls with new ones.  
To continue the stairway to the kitchen.

FIRST FLOOR

To run up the walls on the Dercantel side to the level of the ceiling, as well as those walls facing the yard.  
To furnish the necessary lumber for making floors of that story.  
To change the joists found rotten in the corner apartment.  
To make the flooring of the new living quarters of single facing.  
To pave the kitchen.  
Two warped partitions, similar to those of the entresol.  
To ceil the two rooms newly built, with the exception of the kitchen.  
To make a ceiling over the stairway; also in the parlour. To make a railing for the gallery.  
To do over the new walls, as well as those which are not new.  
To continue the stairway leading to the kitchen of the first floor.  
To change the steps or other parts which might be defective on the main stairway.  
One (1) glazed door with transoms, hung in the room at the end of the new living quarters.  
One (1) glazed door with transoms, in dining room of new living quarters.  
One (1) solid door hung in kitchen; also casement with glass.  
One (1) large (?) in new living quarters.  
Tear down the small stairway leading to the garrett, and build it in the small closet at the end of the gallery.

Three Chimneys.

Elevate the party walls of the new living quarters breast-high over the terrace.

GARRET

To cover with a terrace the new living quarters.

Repair the garret - window overlooking the yard.

To repair the bad spots in the ceiling.

To do over the roof of clasped tinplate; painted over and under.

FURTHERMORE, The undersigned obligate themselves to have constructed some flagstones drain basins and drain piping wherever found necessary. These shall be paid for one half by the undersigned and one half by Messrs. LeMonnier and Grandchamps.

Also, one coat of paint, both as regards the new parts to be built, as well as those of old construction. The latter shall be entirely at the expense of the undersigned; who also bind themselves to have the window sills finished in masonry on the second floor.

(SIGNED) A. Ire. Latour & Laclotte

AGREED under the present detailed statement and estimate of the works which we obligate ourselves to perform, in conformity with a contract this day entered into between ourselves and Messrs. Y. LeMonnier and F. Grandchamps.

New Orleans, May 7, 1811

(SIGNED) A Ire. Latour & Laclotte

END OF AGREEMENT

LOAN . . . . APPLICATION OF PIERRE PEDESCLAUX

N. Broutin, 2/6/1806.

The Undersigned, possessed of an estate valued at Twenty-five Thousand Dollars, applies for a loan under the following conditions:

The amount requested in Seventeen Thousand Dollars.

The amount shall be loaned in installments of a Thousand Dollars each, and so arranged that the loan shall be made by seventeen persons.

Securities for the loan:

The property owner shall mortgage the house valued at \$25,000 and if the stockholders prefer the property transferred to them, it shall be done by an act giving the vendor power of redemption. Furthermore, the house shall be insured against all hazards, for a period of several years, for its full value of \$25,000.

Profit to the Lenders:

Each lender shall receive every two months interest at the rate of 10% on the amount loaned.

Plan of reimbursement:

Each lender shall be reimbursed annually by the surplus from the rentals, after deductions, from these rentals of amounts necessary for the payment of interest and the insurance premium. If in the period of five years the property owner has been unable to reimburse the principal to the borrowers, be it from the surplus, be it from the rentals, be it from his personal means, then the lenders shall sell the house to recover the balance of their loans, the surplus

from said amount belonging to the property owner.

Plan of administration:

As surety to the lenders that their interests shall be faithfully protected during the term stipulated, they shall appoint, from among themselves, commissioners who shall look after receiving and paying out, advising the property-owner of the result. These commissioners shall have passed the mortgage act, or any rental agreement to the advantage of the company; to insure the house, paying the insurance premiums; to proceed with its sale if needs be; or to make a reconveyance of this house in case the proprietor should pay the total amount of the loan.

This loan is made solely to liquidate the amounts due on the house, amounting to \$14,000.00 and the remaining \$3,000.00 are to complete it.

The indifference and the good faith manifested by this property-owner in such proportion can be considered only in his favor; the requests he is making are actuated only by a father's wish to conserve for his numerous children a little inheritance. He is thereby rendered a service when you assist him in protecting his interests.

(SIGNED) Pierre Pedesclaux

ACCEPTANCE OF THE LOAN BY STOCKHOLDERS

We, the undersigned subscribers to a loan applied for by Mr. Pierre Pedesclaux, in conformity with its conditions, we appoint and constitute by these presents, Messrs. Richard Relf, Jean Baptiste Labatut, and Joseph Tricou our agents, to perform for us and

in our names all that may be necessary to carry out the terms and conditions of the said proposals, promising and obligating themselves to approve and ratify everything by them performed, or the majority of them, relating thereto.

It is further understood and agreed that the dividend stipulated in the proposals shall be paid on June 30 and Dec. 31, instead of two months in . . . ?

In witness whereof we have signed these presents at New Orleans, on January 9, 1806.

(SIGNED) Daniel Clark; Ant. Carraby; Wm. Donaldson; Winter & Herman;  
M. Fortier; Boutte; Etate. Bosque; John McDonough;  
F. D. Urquhart; James Sterrett; J. Livaudais; Jos. McNeil

TRANSLATION

Pedesclaux Loan - N. Broutin, Feb. 6, 1806

Today, February 6, 1806, and the thirtieth year of American Independence:

Before me, Narcisse Boutin, Notary Public of the United States of America at New Orleans,

Personally appeared Mr. Pierre Pedesclaux, Notary Public of this city, who states and declares that, owning a house and lot situated in this city, forming the corner of Royal and St. Peter Streets, measuring 60' 8" on the former, and 57' on the latter, bounded on the Royal Street side by the lot of Mr. Jacques Pitot, and on the St. Peter Street side by a house belonging to (although without act) Mr. Paul Darcantel; that this house, not being yet

finished, and being mortgaged for Fourteen Thousand (\$14,000) Dollars, he is contemplating the borrowing of \$17,000 for five years in shares of \$1000 each, fourteen thousand of which would cancel the mortgage and the remaining three thousand to finish the house in question under the following conditions:

First: To pay to the stockholders from the rental of the house 6% per annum.

Second: To have the house insured.

Third: To return the principal amount borrowed, so much from the surplus of the earnings of the rentals, after paying for the said insurance, as well as any other means of which declarer may avail himself.

Fourth: That to insure the payment in question within the time stipulated, the said property be mortgaged in favor of the stockholders, or that declarer should make to them a transfer of the property with power of redemption.

Finally: That the stockholders might appoint commissioners, be it to accept the said mortgage act of sale with the privilege of redemption, or to take charge of the said property, its rentals, etc., and to apportion its revenues among those interested.

That this proposed loan having been negotiated and the terms and conditions accepted by Messrs. Hillare Boutet, Daniel Clark, Winter & Herman, John McDonough, Cheu and Relf, Carraby, Jacques Sterret, Francois Livaudais, Michel Fortier, Wm. Donaldson, Jean Baptiste Labatut, Joseph Tricou, Barthelemy Bosque, Jos. McNeil,

Thomas & David Urquhart; these mentioned should meet on the ninth of January, and having appointed as their commissioners and procurators Messrs. Richard Relf, Jean Baptiste Labatut, Joseph Tricou, as is declared under private seal, both as regards the proposed loan and the act regarding the meeting, which have given me a notary as exhibits, and left with me to be attached to this act.

That the elected commissioners, after conference with those interested, their constituents having judged it proper to accept in lieu of a mortgage act, the act of sale with privilege of redeeming the property in question for the sum of \$17,000, of which \$14,000 is to be paid by the appointed commissioners to Messrs. Sterrett, LeBlanc, Sr., and to the Widow DeLord Sarpy, to whom it is mortgaged, and the other \$3,000 to be employed in the completion of the said property, provided that he relinquish all rights of ownership of the said lot and house to the stockholders mentioned in the persons of their commissioners, always however, under the act providing power of redemption.

And now present, the said commissioners, Messrs. Richard Relf, Jean Baptiste Labatut and Joseph Tricou have accepted this act in its entirety for and in the name of the stockholders, and bind themselves in their respective names to pay to the mortgagee the \$14,000 referred to, to furnish the \$3,000 to the contractor who shall complete the said property, to receive the rental which this property shall earn; from this revenue to pay an annual interest to the stockholders of 6%, as well as the amount paid for insurance and to give the surplus to the vendor Pierre Pedesclaux as well as all other moneys he might furnish them to cancel the principal sum borrowed; and if at the end



of five years the principal sum were not entirely paid, we shall compel the stockholders to sell the property in question for cash for the amount of the principal sum still unpaid, and the balance under terms best suited to the seller, Pierre Pedesclaux; and if within the five years stated, or before the expiration of this term, the said Pedesclaux should refund the principal as well as the interest due, we oblige ourselves in our capacity of commissioners to reconvey to him the said property, and for the execution of these presents the parties hereto have selected this city their domiciliary, and here bind themselves, promise and obligate themselves.

Done at New Orleans, etc., etc.

(SIGNED) Pierre Pedesclaux; Relf; Trioou; Labatut;  
Narcisse Broutin, Notary Public.

SALES AT AUCTION

By Montreuil and McCarthy - Advertisement appearing  
in the April 16 - April 30 issues of the year  
1821 of La Courrier de la Louisiane.

On Tuesday, the first of May next, at 12 o'clock, will be sold at Maspero's Coffee House: The fine house of which Yves Le Monnier and Francois Grandchamps are co-proprietors, situate at the corner of St. Peter and Royal Streets, payable in three equal installments, that is to say - one-third cash; one-third at six - and one-third at 12 months from the day of sale, in approved, endorsed notes with mortgages until final payment.

The purchaser shall be bound to give for each installment two to ten of an equal sum, for the purpose of facilitating the division

among the co-proprietors.

It is well understood that the said Lemonnier and Grandchamps respectively, reserve themselves the right of remaining as tenants in the enjoyment of one-half of said house, which they now occupy during one, two or three months, but no more, as they may deem proper in order to have time enough to move, on paying to the purchaser, each in what concerns him, the rent of the part they respectively occupy, at the rate of 10 percent per year, on the price of the adjudication.

The costs of transfer to be paid by the purchaser.

April 16, 1821

Edward M. Bezou, Translator

Richard Koch, Historian

Samuel Wilson, Jr., Assistant Historian

December 10, 1936

Rev. Dec. 21, 1936

T.W.